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THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF THE ST. LOUIS PLACEMENT BUREAU FOR HANDICAPPED MEN¹

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One phase of the rehabilitation problem which seems to be but meagerly discussed is that concerning the rehabilitation of men handicapped internally, so to speak—of men suffering from medical conditions such as disease of the circulation, respiration or of the nervous system. Here the problem is more difficult and more subtle than when an arm or a leg has been lost. In fact some writers seem to think in terms of lost limbs and consider only the conditions that present the easier and more obvious problems. Perhaps the number of the so-called medical injuries returned from the war may be relatively small, but they play a large rôle in the question of the handicapped industrial worker, and much is to be gained by considering at this time physical disability among industrial workers while the question is fresh and stimulated by the consequences of war.

It is difficult to readjust industrially the man suffering from heart disease or from a functional or organic disease of the nervous system, because symptoms so often arise which disturb his feeling of well-being, and which discourage or alarm him. But the chief difficulty comes from our inability to determine with any degree of accuracy the amount of work that such individuals may do without harmful effects. A somewhat limited but rather intensive study of the medically handicapped from the industrial point of view has shown us the distinct advantage gained by observation of the patient in the work shop for the handicapped, conducted in connection with the hospital and dispensary with which I am connected. Here patients are put to work under the supervision of a trained teacher doing toy making, cement work or weaving. Here the patients are

¹ Since this paper was written, the contribution of Miss Gertrude Stein on Placement Technique in the Employment Work of the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men (*Amer. Jour. Care of Cripples*, 1918, VI, 148) has come to the writer's notice. It should be read by all interested in this problem.

encouraged and restrained by the teacher with tact and judgment and here they are visited by their physicians. The work is often only one hour a day at first, but the time and effort are increased as the patient's physical ability warrants, and usually after several weeks a fairly clear idea of what place each one can take in the open labor market can be determined. During the period in the shop, symptoms without significance can be explained away, while those of moment can be noted and avoided. Patients find their own capacity for work during the work shop period. While there they are educated in the proper method of living so as to stay within and not exceed their physical capacity, a point of prime importance in the successful placement and maintenance of the medically handicapped in a position of economic independence. This procedure as a preliminary to rehabilitation of the medically and often of the surgically disabled deserves emphasis, as it cannot be superseded by the so-called functional tests or formulas no matter how elaborately and carefully they are carried out. The only test of physical efficiency is the work test, carried out after a careful consideration of each individual.

The second phase of the problem of rehabilitation which has so far received but little detailed consideration is that of placement. It will not be practical or expedient to train each handicapped person in a new trade and find a place for him in that trade. Much can be done by industrial adjustment without extensive training, and this is especially true of the industrial cripple, as past experience has shown.

In order to bring the question down to actual experience, I wish to describe the organization and operation of the Placement Bureau for Handicapped Men which has been established in St. Louis. This bureau was organized with the idea of experimenting with disabled civilians in order to gain experience to guide in the industrial placement of crippled soldiers later. The movement was started by the wife of a medical officer who is having an extensive experience in France with cases of "shell-shock." A committee was formed composed of three socially minded women, two sympathetic employers of labor, the director of the Missouri School of Social Economy, the director of the Rankin Trade School, a lawyer and two doctors, one an orthopedic surgeon and one an internist. One of the committee volunteered to work as a full-time secretary, and the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce contributed desk space in its

office. The obvious problem that confronted the bureau was the successful bringing together of an opportunity for work and a handicapped man, and it is easily understood that before they are brought together both the job and the man must be carefully considered and prepared for each other.

The first task of the placement bureau was to investigate the opportunities of the city for the employment of the handicapped and to interest the employers in the project. A general survey of the possibilities of employing the handicapped in the city had just been made by the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, which placed its data at the disposal of the bureau. Besides this, a detailed survey was made of various types of factories and plants, the positions that were suitable for handicapped men being noted. A few of these surveys were made by several members of the committee together and during these excursions numerous problems came up for discussion and many ideas presented themselves. Superintendents and managers were talked to and usually considerable interest was aroused, especially when the possibility of employing crippled soldiers was brought out. This phase of the work is one that must be continually pursued, and the interest once aroused in employers and superintendents must not be allowed to die. Certain positions were selected as concrete examples and employers were asked to save such places for those physically disqualified for other work.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that a first-hand knowledge of working conditions is necessary for intelligent placement of the handicapped and this can only be gained by many visits to plants of various types. The workers must be observed and interviewed, and the mental and nervous exertion must be taken into account as equally important to the physical exertion required by the work. Minor changes in the method of factory work were often discussed with superintendents, and information was obtained as to whether the changes proposed for the benefit of the handicapped were practical and expedient. Hours of work, whether the wage was determined by piece work or time, the average wage earned in various types of work, the attitude of the employer to the laws of liability for industrial accidents, the relation of the plant to union labor, the light, ventilation, rest periods and the general hygienic condition of the plants were some of the questions which were gone into during the visits to the various factories.

These details are enumerated in order to bring out the point that in order to carry on the placement of the handicapped intelligently and successfully a bureau or agency must be established in each industrial center where the problems can be dealt with as individual problems. The work cannot be carried on by following general principles alone. Successful placement means demonstrating to the employer that the handicapped man can make good without personal favors, that he is worthy of his hire, and that the placement bureau is not a bother but a help. Successful placement cannot be accomplished without a definite idea by the person making the placement what the job asked for requires of its occupant, what difficulties surround it and how it is suited for the particular individual sent to fill it. An extensive knowledge is also necessary, as there are so many types and degrees of disability that the one best job for each individual may be hard to find and a large choice is necessary. It seems obvious that each industrial center must have a local board or bureau in order to make a detailed study of local conditions, and the knowledge thus gained is essential for the successful placement of the physically handicapped.

The second task that the Placement Bureau undertook was to find the handicapped men and to awaken their interest in the plans of the bureau. This was done by notifying various relief organizations, hospitals and dispensaries as to what the bureau proposed to do. These organizations were asked to refer to the bureau men whose physical disability hindered them from undertaking the type of work to which they were accustomed. An announcement regarding the purposes of the bureau was also made before the St. Louis Medical Society.

When a physically handicapped man appears, certain data are obtained and entered on a card. Besides the usual data such as age, address and former employment and employers, facts are obtained regarding his injury and his education. The question of employment is presented to him in such a way as to make him feel that he can do more than he has been doing, and he is told what his part must be. Care is taken to have him understand that an effort is necessary on his part, and that such an effort is distinctly worth while. In fact the psychological adjustment which is usually essential is begun as soon as the Placement Bureau has an opportunity to exert this influence, just as it should be begun during convalescence

if, as in the case of wounded soldiers, there is someone at hand to begin this adjustment.

The handicapped man is then examined by a medical man who looks at him from the point of view of the amount and type of work his physical condition will allow. A general medical examination is made to determine the general fitness, and then the particular part of the body causing the handicap is studied in order to determine if an operation or an apparatus could diminish the disability. An entry is made on the patient's card of the diagnosis and type of work advised. It is expected that injuries received by American soldiers will be studied carefully from the point of view of industrial efficiency, but the civilian cripples will not receive this attention until the medical profession is more alive than it is now to the physical requirements of the industrial worker and until it gives more thought to restoring industrial efficiency than it has done in the past. The importance of coöperation of medical men interested in the problem of the placement of the handicapped should be emphasized. The problems that present themselves as to the amount of work a given individual can do, what his limitations are and what chances he has for improvement or recovery, are often very difficult for the medical man to answer, and impossible for those not trained in medicine. Insufficient understanding of the disability of the handicapped often leads to unsuccessful placement, so a close coöperation, preferably by conference, is necessary between the person making the placement and the medical advisor. Each bureau or agency should have two or more medical men attached to it who will not only make careful examinations and give thought to the medical problems involved, but who will also take an interest in and study the industrial conditions in the district in which the placements are made.

After the type of work a handicapped man can do has been determined, the various possibilities for work are shown to him, and he is urged to make a choice or to apply for a position chosen for him. An understanding by the handicapped man of the situation he is to meet is of great assistance, and a certain amount of preparation of the man for the job is often advisable. The man's interest must be aroused not only in the job, but in the cause. The cripple must make good for the sake of other cripples, and he must go to his new job with the feeling that he will do his best for the sake of the place-

ment bureau as well as for his own sake and for the sake of his wage. This attitude of mind can only be accomplished by individual effort, expended with friendliness, sympathy and common sense.

The placements that are made must be followed up in order to discover and profit by failures. Replacements must naturally be frequent, but they will diminish in proportion to the care taken in the first instance. Many placements must be in the nature of experiments and these experiments must be watched, the handicapped man being visited at his work and his case discussed with his overseer and employer. When the bureau has had to deal with men mentally as well as physically handicapped, insurmountable problems have arisen. A bad placement is especially harmful to the cause from the point of view of the employer's confidence, and those making industrial placements of the handicapped must take great pride in their work and exercise much care not to make mistakes. If a job cannot be found that seems to fit the individual, then an attempt must be made to fit the individual for the job. In adjusting the individual to a job, an attempt should always be made to raise the standard of work above that which was previously done, and this has frequently been accomplished. Here the splendid opportunities to be offered by the Federal Board for Vocational Training will prove most useful. No doubt many of the wounded soldiers will also be elevated in the industrial and economic scale by the training they will receive during their convalescence in the so-called reconstruction hospitals.

In working with the industrial handicaps, we have found that opportunities are available for refitting disabled men without government aid. For instance, we have been able to have a man trained as a barber who was unable to continue his work as a steel worker on account of heart disease. Another man obtained training as a motor mechanic at a Y. M. C. A. night school when he was physically unable to carry on the strenuous work of a horseshoer, which he had done for twenty-four years. The young men must not be given the places of caretakers or watchmen until it is shown that nothing better can be done. The trade schools offer many opportunities to the intelligent man who is the victim of accident or disease, and the rehabilitation of the industrial cripple can frequently be undertaken with the facilities which most of our large cities offer. The St.

Louis Bureau has been in close touch with the Rankin Trade School, its director being a member of the committee.

After the St. Louis Placement Bureau had been for several months in successful operation it was taken over by the St. Louis chapter of the Red Cross and is now ready to take up all problems of industrial placement which may be presented to it from the military or civilian population. It is likely that the disabled soldiers will present somewhat different problems from those that have been encountered from the civilian population. They will be better trained, more skillful, younger, more adaptable, and will have had a varying amount of psychological adjustment making them ready to take up the problems at home with the same wonderful spirit of courage and cheerfulness that they have shown on the battlefield.

I have gone into the question of the placement of the handicapped in considerable detail in order to show what the problems are as we have found them. I wish to emphasize that successful placement of the handicapped is one of the important steps in the rehabilitation of the physically disabled, and that it can only be done by a careful study of the conditions of employment on the one hand and of the physically handicapped individual on the other hand. Such a study must be carried on by local committees or agencies and this can best be done by the establishment of placement agencies as part of all local home service work of the American Red Cross.